

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 14 January 2016.

PRESENT

Cllr D McVicar (Chairman)
Cllr B Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D Bowater
F Firth
C C Gomm
Ms A M W Graham

Cllrs J Kane
K C Matthews
R Morris

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	Cllr M Blair A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
		P Downing	Vice Chairman Social Care, Health & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
		Mrs S A Goodchild P Hollick	Chairman of Social Care, Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee
		T Nicols	Chairman of Licensing Committee
		P Smith B J Spurr	Executive Member for Community Services
		B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
		J N Young	Executive Member for Regeneration

Officers in Attendance:	Mr M Coiffait	– Director of Community Services
	Mr A Davie	– Development Infrastructure Group Manager
	Mr G Hughes - Rowlands	– Chief Inspector, Bedfordshire Police
	Mr G Jeffery	– Head of Community Safety, Bedfordshire Fire Service
	Mr P Keates	– Head of Development and Regulation
	Mr J Longhurst	– Director of Regeneration and Business

Mr O Martins – Bedfordshire Police and Crime
Commissioner
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Ms S Templeman – Senior Finance Manager

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SCOSC/15/50 Members' Interests

None.

SCOSC/15/51 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

None.

SCOSC/15/52 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SCOSC/15/53 Petitions

None.

SCOSC/15/54 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

SCOSC/15/55 Call-In

None.

SCOSC/15/56 Requested Items

None.

SCOSC/15/57 Executive Members Updates

The Executive Member for Community Services informed the Committee that despite delays to works on Biggleswade bridge due to high winds, the project was likely to be completed on time.

SCOSC/15/58 Community Safety Partnership Priorities 2016 - 2019

The Director for Community Services delivered the Community Safety Partnership Plan and provided the Committee with details regarding the three emerging priorities. He explained that in order for the Partnership to tackle the issues effectively, it was vital they selected priorities with which they could have the greatest impact. The Director highlighted the need to understand the rise in reported cases of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), some of which could be

attributed to historic cases, but it was important that the Partnership understood the rationale behind recently reported figures.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Bedfordshire confirmed that the priorities identified within the plan closely matched those of the police and national priorities. The PCC highlighted the challenges Bedfordshire police faced, particularly with regards to funding and resources and acknowledged the importance of collaborative working with other agencies, particularly with health colleagues to tackle priorities effectively. To influence crime levels it was important to focus on the prevention of substance and alcohol abuse and ensure that mental health issues were given the appropriate level of attention.

In light of the report Members discussed the following:-

- The deployment of resource and the force's ability to prioritise day to day policing matters, which the Chief Inspector confirmed would still be addressed alongside the priorities identified in the Plan.
- The need for a balance of focus on urban and rural areas.
- That robust measures were needed to tackle street drinking, its causes and other areas of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB).
- The need for a zero tolerance policy regards premises in breach of their license for which the Chief Inspector advised the police did seek to close premises in breach of their licence and advocated robust sanctions. It was agreed that a statutory witness structure would be useful in this regard.
- The vital role of community safety groups and the Partnership.
- The need to improve communication between the police and the Partnership.
- Concerns regarding drug dealing and nuisance motorcycling in the Dunstable area.
- The prevalence of cyber crime in Bedfordshire, which the Chief Inspector confirmed was part of the Force's strategy and was addressed by a cyber crime unit.
- The importance of appropriate training for police staff to deal with sensitive issues such as Domestic Violence (DV) and CSE.

In response the Director confirmed that close liaison was undertaken with community groups to promote the delivery of resilient communities as detailed in the 5-Year Plan. Preventative measures with regards to street drinking were in place and overall communication with the police was good. Close liaison with other Council departments was vital to ensure resource were used effectively.

The PCC explained that whilst he was committed to community policing and increasing the police footfall in the area the force was in the process of devising a new operating model and there were difficult challenges to overcome with regards to resource. Although base locations might change there would still be an appropriate number of dedicated roads police due to collaboration with neighbouring Forces and despite efficiencies the level of service provided would not diminish.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the three Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment Priorities identified for Central Bedfordshire for 2016-19.

SCOSC/15/59 Development Strategy Position Update

The Development Infrastructure Group Manager delivered a presentation regarding the Council's Development Strategy and Local Plan. The Committee were informed that Member leads had been appointed to work closely with neighbouring authorities, ensuring that the duty to cooperate was adhered to. It also confirmed that the call for sites included Gypsy and Traveller (G&T) provision and that the Plan would address the impact of new Government guidelines.

Members raised concerns regarding:-

- The potential for hostile applications during 2016-18 until the Plan was fully adopted. It was confirmed that policies and protections would be in place during the interim period, particularly with regards to unsustainable developments. The definitive position with regards the Council's 5 year land supply would be clarified in February 2016.
- The need to submit proposals in a timely fashion and where possible condense timescales to avoid central government intervention. In response it was confirmed that where possible programmes would be compressed.
- The process regarding community led plans and whether villages should continue with neighbourhood plans. The Director for Regeneration and Business confirmed the new Plan would ensure robust engagement with communities and that both neighbourhood and community led plans were still valid elements of the process.

Cllr Nicols expressed concerns with regards the quantum of homes required for Central Bedfordshire, which he felt was too low. Cllr Nicols felt an appropriate level of allocation across Central Bedfordshire was necessary as his Ward had historically taken a large proportion of the area's need. Cllr Nicols was concerned that assurances had been given previously that there were no plans at that time or in the future to build within his Ward but due to recent developments this was no longer the case.

In response the Infrastructure Group Manager acknowledged that certain areas of Cllr Nicol's Ward had been subject to development in the past and this would be taken into consideration during the further review of proposals. The Executive Member for Regeneration confirmed that Central Bedfordshire's quantum of required homes was 31,000 but this did not include the needs of neighbouring authorities such as Luton. In light of these figures it was difficult to give assurances that any particular Ward would be exempt from future development. The Executive Member did not recall providing past guarantees that Cllr Nicol's Ward would be immune from future development although Sundon had been discussed as a past concern. The Director stressed the importance of ensuring the Council focussed on Central Bedfordshire's need first, then consider the need of neighbouring authorities.

Cllr Nicols expressed further concern that a recent workshop to discuss the Local Plan had only involved Executive Members. In response the Development Infrastructure Group Manager explained the meeting with the Executive was not to make decisions but enabled a review of the strategic overview. The Director highlighted the importance of following due process and

reassured the Committee that all Members would be involved in both formal and informal processes, ensuring that the Council responded appropriately to the pressure of growth within Central Bedfordshire.

NOTED the update.

SCOSC/15/60 Planning Enforcement Review

The Chairman of the Planning Enforcement Review Panel delivered a report, highlighting the recommendations of a recent scrutiny review of planning enforcement. In response to queries the Director for Regeneration and Business explained that the effective deployment of resource was key to improving the service. It was acknowledged that although Planning Enforcement was a non statutory service it was critical to deliver a robust service and the findings of the Review Panel would be carefully considered.

In light of the report Members discussed the logistics of triaging an automated system and concluded that responses to customer queries would require manual input from staff on many occasions. The benefits of a proactive service were discussed and Members agreed the department should give this due consideration when deploying resource.

NOTED the value of the enquiry and its recommendations.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Directorate consider the recommendations as detailed within the report and deliver a further update to the Committee in March 2016, outlining implementation proposals, taking into consideration budget constraints.**
- 2. That a performance monitoring report be submitted to the Committee 6 months after implementation of the agreed recommendations.**

SCOSC/15/61 Draft Budget, Capital and MTFP 2016/17

The Senior Finance Manager delivered a report highlighting financial pressures, proposed efficiency savings, consultation timelines and a proposed increase to Council Tax of 3.75%, 2% of which would be ring fenced for Social Care funding. In light of the report Members discussed the difficulties the Council faced in light of the government settlement and acknowledged that any increase in Council Tax would not provide additional funds, but help mitigate the unexpected shortfall.

Members acknowledged that programmes within the Draft Capital Programme would directly impact revenue payments and queried whether a more robust effort with regards to the sale of capital assets should be made. In response the Director for Community Services confirmed that a comprehensive review of methods to improve targets would be carried out and subsequently considered by the Corporate Resources OSC.

NOTED the report and endorsed the proposed efficiencies as detailed within the Draft Budget, recognising possible changes to figures in light of the government settlement.

RECOMMENDED that a further report detailing final figures be brought to the Committee in March 2016.

SCOSC/15/62 Work Programme 2015/16 and Executive Forward Plan

AGREED the work programme subject to the addition of the following:-

- 1. Planning Enforcement recommendations in March 2016**
- 2. Budget review figures in March 2016**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.02 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)